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## THE POLICY OF SIGMA XI

BY JOHN M. COULTER

My own personal experience with Sigma Xi has been in connection with The University of Chicago, and the most effective policy in that university seems clear. Perhaps it is unscientific to conclude that the same policy would be most effective in all colleges and universities, and yet I have a conviction that this is true. Students are eligible to membership when they have given evidence of ability to investigate, the evidence being either the publication of research or an investigation in progress. As a consequence, the chapter is made up of men and women who are more than interested in science; they are actually working at it and have the point of view that belongs to investigators.

With such an audience, the meetings become real discussions of contributions to knowledge, presented by men who have been eminently successful, rather than popular lectures to interest undergraduates. The whole atmosphere of such meetings is one of scientific and stimulating companionship rather than that of a class room, where some one instructs and others try to recite that which is well known. To join such an organization is worthy of any one's ambition; for it has just the stimulating effect upon scientific endeavor that must have been in the minds of the founders of Sigma Xi.

A scientific society whose members are for the most part undergraduates, guided by the kindly interest of certain members of the faculty, is an organization that a man outgrows. It is a part of his youthful experience, like a college fraternity. He enjoys the memory of it, but it has outlived its usefulness for him. What is needed is an organization that is perennially attractive to scientific men, no matter how much they grow; and it must be evident that such an organization would appeal to the ambition of the undergraduate as no undergraduate organization could.

There is another aspect of undergraduate membership that is worth considering in this connection. The permanency of Sigma Xi as an effective organization must depend upon those who continue in the professional service of science. Undergraduates may include a

considerable number of those who are interested in science as a subject, but the number who continue in science as a profession is much smaller. What we need is an organization that will cull out from those who are interested in science those who are consecrated to science, and the result will be a real scientific society.

It is recognized that colleges and universities differ in the stress laid upon graduate work, but I cannot see why this should compromise the situation. In whatever institution a chapter of Sigma Xi is established, it should be a fellowship in the service of science, made up of workers rather than of guests waited upon by a few workers. To follow a policy of inequality in qualifications for membership would be suicidal, for there could be no real fellowship among chapters, and therefore no real national organization. There must be unity of purpose and equality of membership or disintegration will surely follow.



The Society was founded to "encourage original investigation in science." In its earlier years the Society seemed to fulfill its function by electing to membership those graduating students who had shown themselves apt in receiving instruction in our universities. Now, however, the Society can do more for the encouragement of research by giving recognition to those who have themselves engaged in the research function of the University and have contributed something to the advancement of knowledge. More important still than the recognition of research is the association of research workers for mutual encouragement and for the creation of more favorable conditions for research.

It is as fellow-workers in the search after truth and in the encouragement of research that we receive you into the Minnesota Chapter of Sigma Xi.

J. B. JOHNSTON.

*From Initiation Address, June 1913*